

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A secure postage metering device having a computer and a printhead drivable by the computer for imprinting indicium on a piece of mail, the metering device further comprising means for receiving programming instructions from a remote location for operation of the computer, means for establishing an amount of postage to be imprinted as part of the indicium on the piece of mail, wherein the computer is operative in response to said programming instructions to cryptographically encode the indicium by use of a coding key included within said programming instructions, an encoded indicium on the piece of mail being readable by a reading device of the Postal Service for verification of authenticity of postage appearing on the piece of mail.
2. A metering device according to claim 1, further comprising means for entering a choice of coding into the computer.
3. A metering device according to claim 2, wherein said entering means permits manual entering of said choice of coding in conjunction with utilization of said coding key received from said remote location.
4. A metering device according to claim 3, wherein said receiving means is operative to receive a signal from the remote location providing data as to an amount of postage authorized to be dispensed by the metering device.

5. A metering device according to claim 1, wherein said indicium includes a one-dimensional image composed of markings defining a representation of coded data.
6. A metering device according to claim 1, wherein said indicium includes a two-dimensional image composed of markings arranged in two dimensions defining a representation of coded data.
7. A metering device according to claim 6, wherein said indicium further comprises an alphanumeric character.
8. A metering device according to claim 7, wherein said alphanumeric character represents an amount of postage paid.